United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council, in Presidential statement, condemns attempts to prevent return of refugees to Rwanda; urges former leadership and new Government to cooperate in reconciliation and repatriation efforts.

+ Secretary-General expresses concern over recent violence in Burundi; consults with Special Representative on possible steps to be taken.

+ Special Representative Akashi urges Bosnian parties to show military restraint, warning that recent fighting could escalate into war.

+ Artillery exchanges decrease dramatically in Bosnia and Herzegovina after UNPROFOR issues stern warning to opposing forces.

+ UNHCR asks donors to respond generously and flexibly to Rwanda/Burundi appeal; faces $71 million shortfall in initial budget.

+ Special Rapporteur on human rights in former Yugoslavia says serious violations are being committed throughout region; urges International Tribunal to deploy investigators and begin prosecutions.

+ WHO warns Yokohama Aids Conference of remarkable increase in HIV/tuberculosis infections in Asia.

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The Security Council today strongly condemned attempts to intimidate Rwandan refugees and to prevent them from returning home. In a statement read out by its President, Yuliy Vorontsov (Russian Federation), the Council urged the former leadership and those who had assumed political responsibility in refugee camps to cooperate with the new Rwandan Government in reconciliation and repatriation efforts and to halt propaganda campaigns inducing refugees to stay in exile. It welcomed the Government's declared readiness to encourage the return of refugees, to ensure their protection and legal rights, and to allow aid to reach those who required it anywhere in the country. The Council also called on the Government to ensure that there were no reprisals against those who wished to return home.

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The Council urged the Rwandan Government to cooperate with the United Nations in ensuring that those guilty of atrocities, particularly genocide, were brought to justice through an appropriate mechanism which would ensure fair and impartial trials in accordance with international standards of justice. It welcomed the Government's recent expression of support for the establishment of an international tribunal, and the Secretary-General's establishment of the Commission of Experts to investigate humanitarian violations and acts of genocide in Rwanda.

The Council said that full deployment of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was important to establish a more secure environment for the return of refugees and to prevent further population movmements. It was essential that UNAMIR contingents be deployed without delay, and that the technical assistance they needed be provided as soon as possible.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed concern at recent violence in Bujumbura, which has reportedly claimed at least 15 lives, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Secretary-General discussed the situation with senior aides this morning and was in contact with his Special Representative in Burundi, Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, regarding steps that might be taken.

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Special Representative Yasushi Akashi today warned that recent fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina could escalate into war, and appealed to the parties there to show the utmost military restraint. He also appealed to them to continue negotiations in a constructive manner and to comply with existing agreements, pledging that the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was ready to facilitate the peace process.

Mr. Akashi reiterated his hope that the Agreement signed by the parties in Geneva on 8 June would be a first step towards a complete cease-fire in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While observance of the Agreement had been far from satisfactory, there had been no general offensive by either party in the past two months. Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had achieved some momentum towards the release of prisoners of war. He noted that the parties had been willing to show some flexibility on many issues, and underlined UNPROFOR's role as a bridge between those who did not trust each other but who desired peace.

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There was relative calm throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina today after United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) Commander Lieutenant-General Michael Rose issued a stern warning to the parties to the conflict there, according to a spokesman for the Organization. Lieutenant-General Rose took that action after a Bosnian Government military offensive north of Sarajevo

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led to heavy fighting. Up to 1,000 shells had been landing daily on the periphery of the Sarajevo exclusion zone, but there was a dramatic decrease in artillery exchanges today.

Meanwhile, the Force Commander of UNPROFOR, Lieutenant-General Bertrand de Lapresle was in New York for regular consultations, the spokesman noted. He met today with Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and was scheduled to address a troop contributors meeting tomorrow.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today appealed to donors to respond generously to the Rwanda/Burundi emergency, asking that funds be broadly earmarked so that they might be applied as circumstances dictated. The agency said it was facing a shortfall of $71 million in its initial regional budget of $258 million. Moreover, the budget did not cover the cost of repatriating refugees to Rwanda -- estimated at up to $50 million -- or the cost of operations in Zaire from mid-October to the end of the year.

The UNHCR said it urgently needed drugs and other medical supplies, aviation fuel, heavy equipment for preparing sites and for burials, trucks and ambulances. It also detailed the requirements for seven way-stations to be established between Goma and Kigali to assist returning refugees.

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The Special Rapporteur on human rights in the former Yugoslavia, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, has issued a preliminary report on his recent mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It contains his immediate conclusions and focuses on matters requiring urgent attention. A more comprehensive report will be issued in due course.

The Special Rapporteur received indications that serious human rights violations were being committed in the whole region. He called attention to the plight of civilian detainees, who were often held in poor conditions, and prisoners of war, who were being used as forced labour at confrontation lines. While conditions in Sarajevo had improved, the lack of freedom of movement and of economic opportunity led to despair. Mostar had been been devastated by fighting, and there were reports of "soft ethnic cleansing" in the displacement of Muslims there. Meanwhile, there had been intensive fighting within the Bihac pocket. He did not visit areas under Bosnian Serb control, but received reliable reports of ongoing ethnic cleansing there.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was in a very difficult economic situation because of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and the economic embargo imposed by Greece, according to the report. The country should receive adequate compensation for losses resulting from sanctions and the embargo must be lifted.

The building of trust in the region was hampered by the sense that war criminals were still at large, the Special Rapporteur said. The International

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Criminal Tribunal had done little to change that situation, and was perceived as remote and irrelevant. He urged that the Tribunal move quickly to gain local trust by deploying investigators and commencing prosecutions.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) today warned that the number of people in Asia who developed tuberculosis because they were infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) would multiply almost seven-fold this decade. Preliminary figures on HIV/TB co-infection in the region were remarkably high, according to a statement issued by the WHO Tuberculosis Programme during the Tenth International Conference on AIDS in Yokohama, Japan. In several studies, between 52 and 70 per cent of AIDS cases in Thailand, India and Nepal had developed TB.

"Tuberculosis and HIV are feeding off each other at an alarming rate," said Dr. Arata Kochi, Programme Manager of the WHO Tuberculosis Programme. With nearly half of all people in Asia already infected by TB, and HIV infection increasing, it is impossible to predict how bad the dual epidemics might get, according to the agency.

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